

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Texas Mid-Coast

## National Wildlife Refuge Complex

### Planning Update #1

August 2009

*This is the first in a series of updates on the development of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. It announces the beginning of the planning process and asks for your help in identifying the issues that need to be addressed in the Complex's Plan. When completed, the Plan will provide management direction for the Complex for the next 15 years.*

**The purpose for which  
Texas Mid-Coast National  
Wildlife Refuge Complex  
was established and shall  
be managed is**

*"...for use as an inviolate  
sanctuary, ... for any other  
management purposes, ...  
for migratory birds."*

**Migratory Bird  
Conservation Act  
(16 U.S.C. 712d).**

**National Wildlife Refuge  
System Mission**

*"...to administer a national  
network of lands and  
waters for the conservation,  
management, and where  
appropriate, restoration  
of the fish, wildlife, and  
plant resources and their  
habitats within the United  
States for the benefit  
of present and future  
generations of Americans"*

**(National Wildlife Refuge  
System Improvement Act of  
1997, Public Law 105-57).**

### Greeting from the Complex Manager

Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) invites you to participate in the public scoping process, which will help us identify the issues, to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the refuge complex. This multi-year, master planning process will produce a plan that will help guide refuge management for the next 15 years.

Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the process, so I'd like to invite you to participate. Turn the page for more information about comprehensive conservation planning and getting involved in the process.

I hope you'll feel free to contact us, if you have any questions. You'll find our phone numbers and email addresses within this update. I look forward to seeing you at one of our future meetings.

Thank you

Jennifer Sanchez

Complex Refuge Manager, Texas Mid-Coast NWR Complex



## What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

In general, a comprehensive conservation plan does the following:

- Ensures that the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System are being fulfilled
- Ensures national policy is integrated with refuge management direction
- Ensure that the refuges continue to conserve fish, wildlife and ecosystems in the face of climate change and other stressors.
- Provides opportunity for public participation in developing management guidance
- Provides a step-by-step process for making and recording refuge decisions
- Establishes a broad management direction for refuge programs and activities
- Provides a way to evaluate accomplishments over time

## Public Involvement

Public Involvement is essential in the planning process. Everyone interested in the management of the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex, consisting of Brazoria NWR, San Bernard NWR, and Big Boggy NWR, will have several opportunities to be involved.

This newsletter is one of the first steps in soliciting your views in developing the plan. You will also have opportunity to provide input at public meetings. The Complex will hold open houses in three different locations. Please come and share your ideas about the Texas Mid-Coast NWR Complex. Following are a list of dates, times, and locations of the public meetings. Please direct all inquiries to the Complex, 979/964-4011.

**Tuesday, September 15, 2009**

6-8 p.m.

Lake Jackson Library

250 Circle Way St.

Lake Jackson, TX 77566

**Wednesday, September 16, 2009**

6-8 p.m.

Demi-John VFD (Fire Hall)

4501 County Road 459A

Freeport, TX 77541

**Thursday, September 17, 2009**

10 a.m.-3p.m.

Texas Mid-Coast NWR Complex Headquarters

2547 CR 316

Brazoria, TX

## Steps of the Planning Process

*We are here*

**What should we consider?**

*Identify the Issues*



**How can we act on the issues?**

*Develop Alternatives*



**How well will each alternative work?**

*Analyze Alternatives*



**Which would work best?**

*Select an Alternative*



**Public review and comment**

*Publish Draft Plan*



**Another chance for public to review and comment**

*Publish Final Plan*



**Final decision made public**

*Publish Record of Decision*



**Implement Plan and revise as needed**

## About the Complex

The Texas Mid-Coast NWR Complex is located along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast and consists of three refuges: Brazoria and San Bernard, located in Brazoria County, and Big Boggy in Matagorda County, Texas. Discontinuous refuge parcels, and conservation easements, located primarily within the forested bottomlands of the Brazos, San Bernard and Colorado River basins, are also part of the Complex. All three of the refuges are comprised largely of coastal marsh with tidal interchange along the Gulf of Mexico. These coastal marsh communities grade inland into coastal prairie, which gives way to bottomland forests along the rivers and bayous.

The complex offers a haven for both wildlife and people. For wildlife, the expanse of marshes, sloughs, ponds, prairies, and forests represent feasting and lodging for more than 400 species of wildlife including 320 species of birds. For visitors, the Complex provides hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. The CCP will provide other agencies and the public with a clear understanding of the desired conditions for the Refuge, and how the Service will implement management strategies for the conservation and development of these natural resources.



## Draft Refuge Vision Statement

The Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex will preserve and protect the wildlife and habitat of the Texas Mid-Coast Region, including the salt marshes and estuaries, the prairies and freshwater wetlands and the Columbia Bottomlands forest ecosystem. The refuges will serve as a resilient source of natural evolving habitats and ecosystem processes even as structure and composition are altered due to climate changes and adjacent areas are increasingly fragmented and altered by human development. The Complex will endeavor to protect habitats and the wildlife dependant on them by conserving, enhancing, and restoring a network of public lands and waters. These Refuges will provide quality habitat for native plants and wildlife, with emphasis on migratory birds, waterfowl, and threatened and endangered species.

The Complex will seek partnerships with land-owners, local and regional organizations, and State and Federal agencies to achieve national and regional conservation goals, for the benefit of present and future generations. The Complex will continue to provide and develop high quality programs and facilities to connect people to nature while building support for the refuge and enhancing the local community.



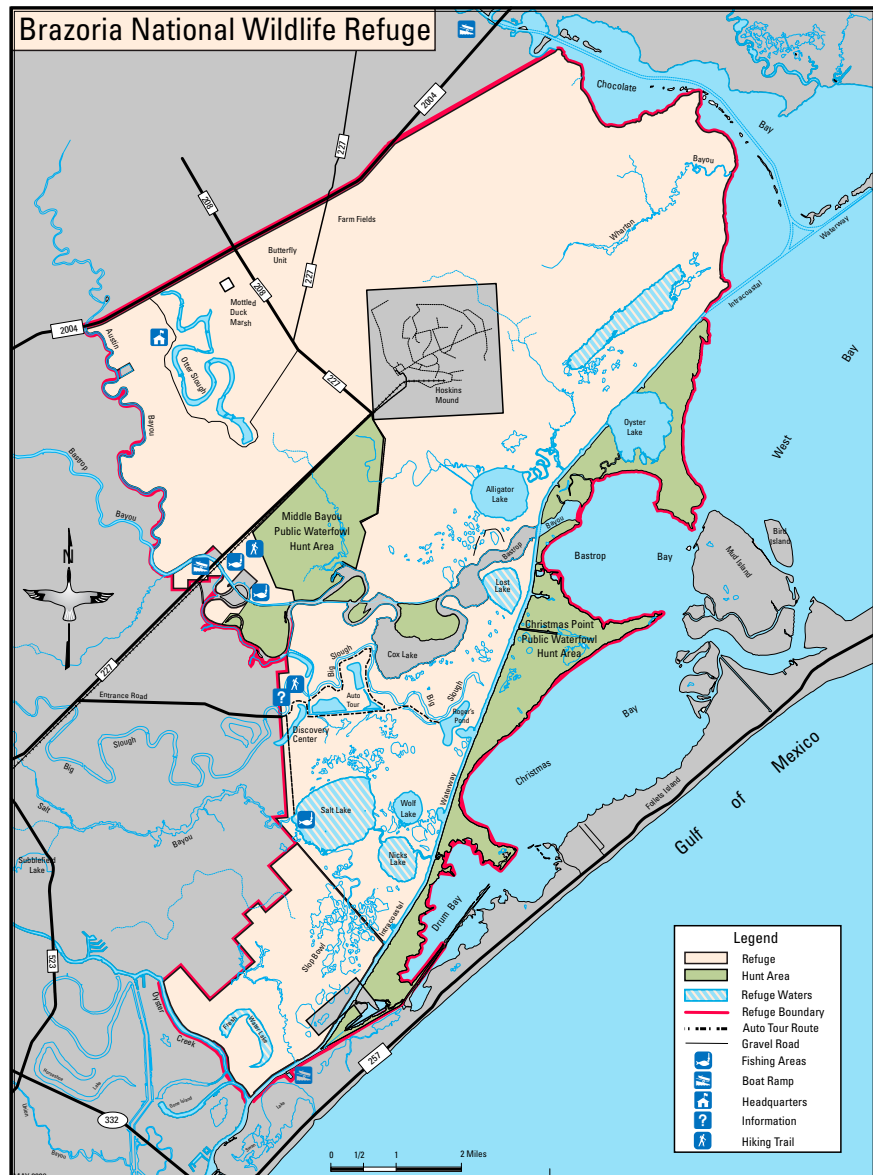
### Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge

Brazoria NWR was established in 1966. This refuge has a key location on the Texas Gulf which helps Freeport draw one of the highest Audubon Christmas bird counts in the nation - more than 200 species. In winter, snow geese, Canada geese, pintail, northern shoveler, teal, gadwall, American wigeon and mottled ducks fill the plentiful ponds and sloughs to capacity. Sandhill cranes join in too. In summer, birds that nest on the refuge include ten species of herons and egrets, white ibis, roseate spoonbill, mottled duck, white-tailed kite, clapper rail, horned lark, seaside sparrow, black skimmer, and scissor-tailed flycatcher.

The Refuge offers several opportunities for the public. Waterfowl hunting for ducks, geese, and coots is permitted in certain areas of the Refuge. The regular waterfowl season runs from late October through mid-January. Three fishing areas are available: Bastrop Bayou, Clay Banks, and Salt Lake. Fishing is permitted year-round. At Brazoria, the Big Slough Recreation Area with the Discovery Center is the primary destination for wildlife observation, photography, and interpretation. The Discovery Center at Brazoria NWR has been in service since 2005, serving as a meeting site for refuge staff and the Friends of the Brazoria NWR, as well as a visitor



contact station. However, its primary function has been as the focus for the Complex's active environmental education program. The Discovery Environmental Education Program (DEEP) has been functioning at Brazoria NWR since 1994. The DEEP currently serves approximately 3,000 students.

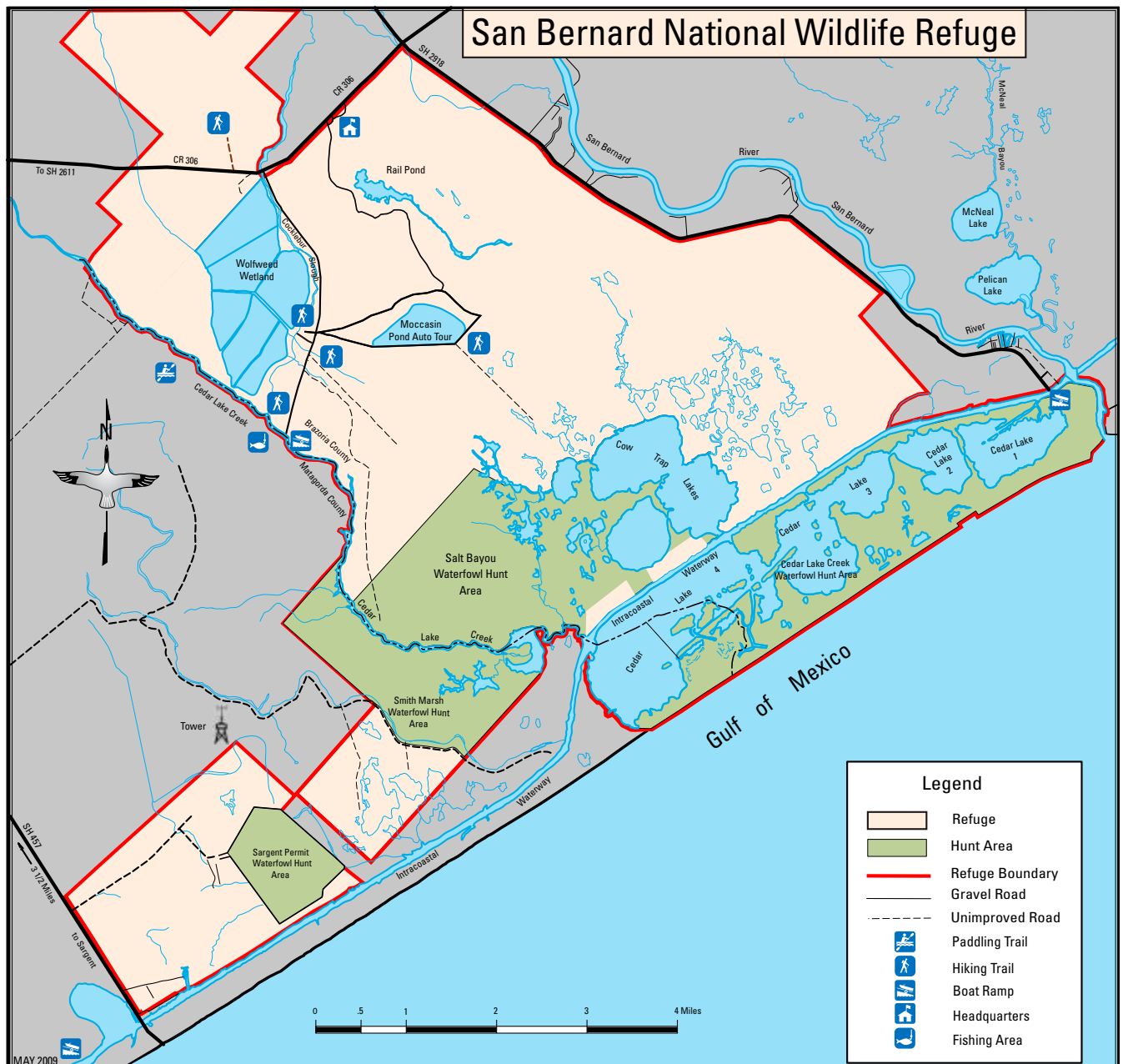


## San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge

### San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge

San Bernard NWR was established in 1968. Less than half of the refuge is open to the public, leaving a vast landscape as wildlife sanctuary. Yet, a drive on the 3-mile auto tour or a hike on one of the three hiking trails can take up a full day's worth of wildlife watching. Refuge bottomland forests and willow trees along the tour road attract high numbers of warblers migrating north. Snow geese both roost and feed in the winter.

San Bernard NWR has four designated hunting areas. San Bernard's Cocklebur Slough Auto Tour is a primary public use area. Included in this are the Moccasin Pond Tour Loop and the Cedar Lake Creek Fishing Areas. Additional bottomland recreation sites include the San Bernard Oak Trail and Hudson Woods. The San Bernard NWR Discovery Environmental Education Program activities occur primarily at the Hudson Woods Unit, making use of the Discovery Outpost, the entrance road, and various trails. The DEEP currently serves approximately 500 students and in future years may be expanded.

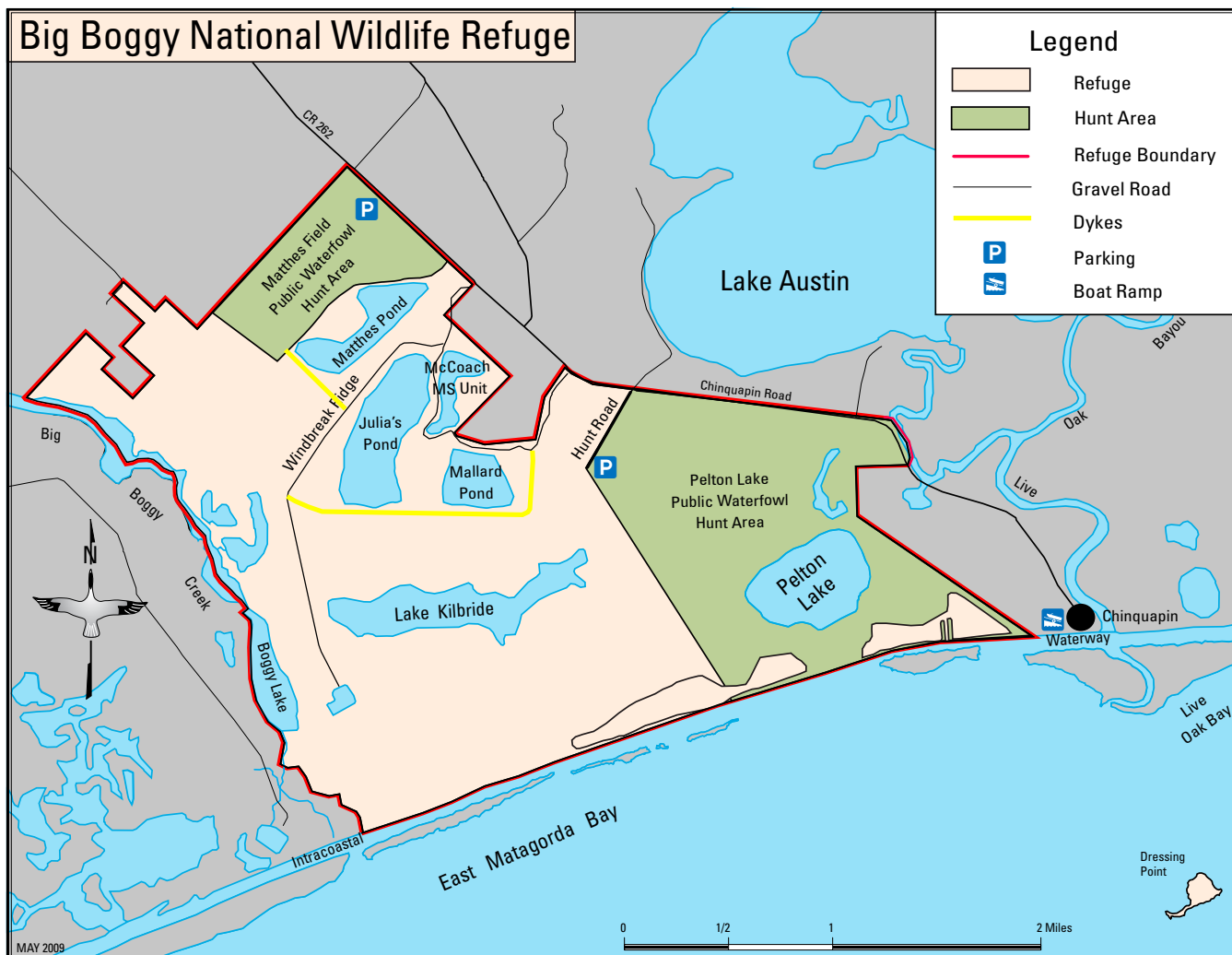


## Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge

### Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge

Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1983 and encompasses 5,000 acres of salt marsh. This refuge is for the birds. Only open to the public for waterfowl hunting season and for special activities, the refuge serves as a salt marsh sanctuary. Dressing Point Island is one of the most prominent bird rookeries on the Texas Coast. Roseate spoonbills, white ibis, snowy egrets vie for nesting space along with the endangered brown pelican.

Like Brazoria and San Bernard NWR's, this refuge conserves key coastal wetlands for migratory birds in spring and fall, as well as for wintering waterfowl and year-round wildlife.



## Issues Workbook

### *Let's Get Started*

Please complete the following workbook for the Texas Mid-Coast NWR Complex. Feel free to add additional comments in the space provided. The comments we receive will help us identify issues and identify the best alternative for long term management of each refuge in the Texas Mid-Coast NWR Complex. (Use additional paper if necessary).

### **Questions Pertaining to Your Refuge Experience**

#### *Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge*

1. How many times a year do you visit Brazoria NWR?

1-5      6-10      11-15      16-20      20+

#### *San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge*

How many times a year do you visit San Bernard NWR?

1-5      6-10      11-15      16-20      20+

#### *Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge*

How many times a year do you visit Big Boggy NWR?

1-5      6-10      11-15      16-20      20+

2. What are your favorite activities to engage in while visiting the Refuge?

#### *Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge*

#### *San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge*

#### *Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge*

3. What areas of the refuge do you usually visit?

#### *Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge*

- ☐ Auto Tour Loop and Big Slough Trail
- ☐ Salt Lake Fishing Area
- ☐ Bastrop Bayou Fishing Area
- ☐ Clay Banks Fishing Area
- ☐ Public Hunting Areas
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

*San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge*

- ☐ Auto Tour Loop and Big Slough Trail
- ☐ Big Tree Trail
- ☐ Hudson Woods Unit
- ☐ Betty Brown Unit
- ☐ Cedar Lake Creek Fishing Area
- ☐ Public Hunting Areas
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

*Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge*

- ☐ Public Hunting Areas
- ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. With a larger perspective in mind, what do you value most about the Refuge?

*Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge*

*San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge*

*Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge*

5. What do you consider to be the most important problem facing the Refuge today?

*Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge*

*San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge*

*Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge*



**Questions Pertaining to Natural Resources Conservation**

1. What do you think of our DRAFT Vision Statement?  
Do you have any comments or suggestions for improving it?

2. Are any of the following natural resource issues a concern to you in the ecosystems on and surrounding the Brazoria, San Bernard, and Big Boggy NWRs? If so, please rank your top three choices. (Use Br=Brazoria, SB=San Bernard, or BB=Big Boggy)  
1 = highest concern and 3 = lowest concern of your three choices.

NWR	Rank	
_____	_____	the development and fragmentation of habitats
_____	_____	invasion of exotic plant and animal species
_____	_____	increased use in sensitive habitat areas
_____	_____	degradation of water quality
_____	_____	lack of active management to improve wildlife habitats
_____	_____	prairie habitat restoration
_____	_____	bottomland forest restoration
_____	_____	impacts to refuge resource contributed by a changing climate
_____	_____	other issues (please specify)

3. If possible, please provide additional details on why you selected the above.  
In particular, we would be interested to know specific locations of concern.

4. Please include here any additional comments on conserving fish and wildlife habitat.

### Questions Pertaining to Public Uses

It is important to recognize there are laws and policies which guide management of public uses on National Wildlife Refuges. National Wildlife Refuges are closed to public use until officially designated open. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 identifies six priorities for wildlife-dependent public use on national wildlife refuges: environmental education, interpretation, fishing, hunting, wildlife observation and photography. Public uses are permitted when they are “compatible” with the purpose(s) for which a refuge was established. In determining compatibility the USFWS considers: 1) anticipated impacts to natural resources; 2) safety; and, 3) budget and staffing.

This planning process will evaluate these and other opportunities for priority public use on the refuge.

### Public Use Opportunities at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge staff and volunteers host hands-on environmental education programs for school groups. The Information Pavilion has interpretive panels inside and you may walk out on the boardwalk across wetlands to the Big Slough Hiking Trail. Brazoria NWR offers a wetland boardwalk, observation decks, and a seven-mile self-guided auto tour. The Bastrop Bayou Public Fishing Area features a universally-accessible lighted fishing pier, bank fishing pulloffs, and a restroom. Clay Banks Public Fishing Area provides a mile of all-weather access to the banks of Bastrop Bayou. Boaters can fish on Nick’s, Salt, and Lost Lakes. Christmas Bay and Middle Bayou Public Hunting Areas are open during waterfowl hunting season.

### Public Use Opportunities at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge

There is wildlife viewing from your vehicle on the 3-mile Moccasin Pond Auto Tour. The Bobcat Woods, Scissor-tail, and Cow Trap Marsh are three hiking trails where you can get a closer view of wildlife. To view the bottomland forest there is an accessible boardwalk winding through shady woods along Cocklebur Slough. From the boardwalk, visitors can access the Wolfweed Wetlands, where large numbers of waterfowl and wading birds roost and feed. Anglers can fish and crab on Cedar and Cow Trap Lakes and Cedar Lake Creek. A public boat ramp provides access to Cedar Lake Creek. Bank fishing is available there too. Designated areas of Cedar Lakes, Cow Trap Lakes, Salt Bayou, and Smith Marsh are open to waterfowl hunting during waterfowl season and extended goose season.

### Public Use Opportunities at Big Boggy NWR

This refuge is only open to the public for waterfowl hunting season and for special activities, it serves as a salt marsh sanctuary for roseate spoonbills, white ibis, snowy egrets, endangered brown pelican, and other migratory birds.



## Issues Workbook

1. Please let us know how well our facilities meet your needs.

In the table below, rate how well the offered activity at each Refuge meets your needs by placing a numerical rating (1=not at all thru 5=excellent). Then, identify how important the activity is to you by circling A, B, C, or D.

Example show in yellow below

..... 1=Not at all, 2=Somewhat, 3=Moderately, 4=Very Well, 5=Excellent

Please Check Only One

	Brazoria NWR	San Bernard NWR	Big Boggy NWR	Very Important	Important	Somewhat	Not Important
<b>EXAMPLE</b> Hiking/Walking trails for wildlife viewing opportunity	5	2	N/A	A	B ✓	C	D
Hiking/Walking trails for wildlife viewing opportunity			N/A	A	B	C	D
Outdoor education activities			N/A	A	B	C	D
Community Outreach				A	B	C	D
Access for people with disabilities				A	B	C	D
Visitor information/orientation center			N/A	A	B	C	D
Waterfowl hunting opportunities				A	B	C	D
Website with information about the refuge and its activities				A	B	C	D
Brochures			N/A	A	B	C	D
Fishing opportunities			N/A	A	B	C	D
Kiosks or signs with refuge information or its wildlife			N/A	A	B	C	D
Viewing areas with information about different wildlife habitats			N/A	A	B	C	D
Directional signs for refuge				A	B	C	D
Access for canoes and kayaks			N/A	A	B	C	D
Cultural preservation and interpretation			N/A	A	B	C	D
Historical preservation and interpretation			N/A	A	B	C	D
Guided bird walks, lectures, presentations			N/A	A	B	C	D
Opportunities to interact with refuge staff			N/A	A	B	C	D
Bicycle trails/roads			N/A	A	B	C	D
Other services (Please specify)			N/A	A	B	C	D

2. Are any of the following visitor service and public use issues a major concern to you on the Refuge? If so please check (in priority order) your top choices.

NWR    Rank

- |       |       |   |
|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | lack of wildlife related visitor services or opportunities on the Refuge      |
| _____ | _____ | lack of full-time public use staff  |
| _____ | _____ | possible conflicts between public uses/facilities and wildlife/habitat values |
| _____ | _____ | vehicle access or trespass  |
| _____ | _____ | illegal hunting   |
| _____ | _____ | other public use issues or concern (please list)                              |

3. Would you support the initiation of a entrance fee for Brazoria and San Bernard National Wildlife Refuges to help support maintenance and development of public use facilities on the Refuge?

Yes

No

4. Please include here any additional comments on existing and future recreation and education opportunities, and new public use facilities.

*Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge*

*San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge*

*Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge*

5. Where did you obtain this workbook? Your answers will help us determine the most effective ways to distribute these in the future.



## Next Steps

Once scoping is complete the planning team will review the concerns identified by the public along with management concerns identified by Refuge staff and those submitted by the state and federal agencies. Once the significant issues have been identified we will develop options, in the form of alternatives, to prepare the Draft Plan. A detailed description of alternatives will be included in the Draft Plan. This plan will include an analysis of how each alternative will affect the environment. After public review and comment of the draft document, including public meetings, a Final Plan will be prepared. Following a public review of the Final Plan, a decision will be made and implementation of the Plan will begin.

## That's It!

Now that you are done, please mail the entire workbook back to us by September 21, 2009 (use the pre-printed return address sheet). We will summarize these comments and those received at public meetings in our next newsletter. Please help us keep our mailing list updated by completing the following:

If you wish to receive future "Planning Updates" about the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex comprehensive conservation plan, please fill in the appropriate information below and return it with the Issues Workbook.

\_\_\_\_ (Yes) Keep me on your mailing list/add me to your mailing list

Please specify in which form you would like to receive a copy of the draft plan for review.

\_\_\_\_ Electronic (CD) \_\_\_\_ Hardcopy

\_\_\_\_ (No) Take me off your mailing list.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization please complete the following two items.

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please note that names on our mailing list and any submitted comments become part of the public record for this project. The Service must release names, if requested, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.

*Thank you for your time!*

## Texas Mid-Coast *National Wildlife Refuge Complex Planning Update*

### Mail issues workbooks to:

Joseph Lujan  
Natural Resource Planner  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Planning  
P.O. Box 1306  
Albuquerque, NM 87103

Workbooks may also be  
mailed to or dropped-off at  
the Texas Mid-Coast NWR  
Complex office.



### For the additional information about the planning process, contact:

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505/248-7458  
joseph\_lujan@fws.gov

### For the additional information about the Complex, contact:

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**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**<http://www.fws.gov>**

*All photographs, USFWS*

**August 2009**

Joseph Lujan  
Natural Resource Planner  
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P.O. Box 1306  
Albuquerque, NM 87103

Place  
Stamp  
Here

Joseph Lujan  
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**Additional Postage Required**  
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